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ABSTRACT

The School-Family Partnership (SFP) project at the University of Illinois at Chicago created a self-assessment tool to measure perceptions and practices of teachers and parents, with the overall mission of identifying and developing effective SFP practices. Parent questionnaires, in English and Spanish, and a teacher questionnaire were developed. The parent questionnaire covered parent involvement at home and school and their perceptions of teacher outreach. The teacher questionnaire covered similar aspects of involvement and outreach. Of the 272 parents who completed the questionnaire, 84% were the mother or stepmother of the child. Of the 43 teachers who completed the questionnaire, 73% had more than 5 years of teaching experience. In response to views expressed by parents and teachers, a number of SFP activities were enhanced or implemented. Parents were given tips to assist their children with homework more effectively, and they were encouraged to read with their children and take them to the library. Teachers were assisted to develop positive notes or certificates to inform parents of something good their child did. Teachers were also offered helpful tips on how to create newsletters and other informative documents, and they were given helpful ideas to maximize the benefits of a parent-teacher conference. Appendixes contain the parent questionnaire in English and Spanish and the teacher questionnaire. (SLD)

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Laboratory for Student Success

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The Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University
Center for Research in Human Development and Education

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The research reported herein was supported in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education through a contract to the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) established at the Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education (CRHDE), and in part by CRHDE. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of the supporting agencies, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

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Introduction

Parent involvement has emerged during the recent years as an important influence on a child's schooling. Researchers, policymakers, and the media have put the issue on the center stage of American education. Research has provided ample evidence that parent involvement plays a crucial role in a student's academic, and policymakers have included increased parent participation in the National Educational Goals for the year 2000. Assessment of the needs and perceptions of both parents and teachers is the first step toward the effective implementation of School-Family Partnership programs.

The School-Family Partnership (SFP) project at the University of Illinois at Chicago, which started in December, 1994, created a self-assessment tool to measure perceptions and practices of teachers and parents. The overall mission of the project is to identify and develop effective SFP practices that enhance the academic achievement and socioemotional development of children.

The project has been focusing its efforts on two major issues: (a) fostering constructive and consistent communication and collaboration between school personnel and parents; and (b) facilitating parental participation in education, both in school and in home learning activities. During the 1996-1997 school year the SFP project worked in collaboration with three inner-city public elementary schools to investigate existing perceptions and practices on school-family relationships and to pilot strategies to promote positive home-school interactions. As the first step, the project created assessment tools to measure parent and teacher perceptions and practices on parent involvement. Assessment of SFP beliefs and practices is an important step toward the effective implementation of parent involvement strategies. In this way, starting points for intervention can be identified and implementation of SFP practices can be better targeted. Based on feedback from practitioners and specialists in the field, the measures were revised and refined. The results of these assessment efforts guided our intervention practices and pointed to

areas that required particular attention. In order to assist parents and teachers in communicating and collaborating more effectively, the project developed materials for both parents and teachers in areas such as homework, communication, and parent-teacher conferences.

The assessment and intervention process has been well-received by parents and teachers. Findings from the SFP surveys provide a profile of perceptions and practices that can be used by schools to understand the level and nature of parent and teacher involvement in SFP initiatives and plan targeted interventions.

The Survey

Both a parent and a teacher questionnaire were constructed. The parent questionnaire has an English and a Spanish version to serve the predominantly Spanish-speaking parents in inner-city schools. Appendix A presents the teacher survey. Appendices B and C include copies of the parent survey in English and Spanish, respectively.

Parent Survey

The survey contains 37 items on SFP issues and 14 items on demographics. The questionnaire covers the following areas: (a) parent involvement at home; (b) parent-initiated involvement at school; (c) parent perceptions about teacher's parent outreach efforts; (d) parent's willingness to expand his/her involvement in various ways; and (e) background information. Three- or four-point scales were used to measure most of these areas.

Teacher Survey

The survey contains 42 items on SFP issues and 5 items on demographics. The questionnaire covers the following areas: (a) parent outreach strategies that teachers were currently applying; (b) teacher perceptions of parent responsiveness to parent involvement initiatives; (c) teacher perceptions of current level of parent practices; (d) teacher's willingness to expand his/her involvement in various ways; and (e) background information. Either four- or

three-point scales were used to measure these areas. Open-ended items were also included in the questionnaire.

Who Was Sampled?

Teacher and parent surveys were distributed in the three schools which participate in and collaborate with the SFP project. Two of the three schools serve a predominantly African-American population and the third mostly Latino families. During the 1996-1997 academic year, two of the schools (one of the African-American schools and the Latino school) had been placed on "academic probation" because the majority of the students had been scoring below state and national norms in standardized tests. Questionnaires were distributed to parents of pre-kindergarten through third grade students who were attending a project classroom.

It must be noted that the majority of the items in the questionnaire are developmentally appropriate for the upper elementary grades as well, but as a starting point the SFP project focused on the early grades. Teacher questionnaires were administered to all teachers in pre-kindergarten through third grade. Both parents and teachers were given a week to complete and return the surveys. Follow-up was done selectively in those classrooms or schools where the home return rate was considered to be low (below 30%). The overall return rate was 64% for the parent surveys and 74% for the teacher surveys.

Major Findings

The sections below include combinations of the following elements: specification of the broader topics, presentation of the key findings within a given area, tables with detailed findings, and lists with helpful practical hints for educators and parents that can remediate weaknesses and increase a child's academic and social competence.

Background Information

Of the 272 parents who completed the questionnaire, 84% were the mother or stepmother of the child. On average, there were two adults and three children living in the

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households surveyed, but in 52% of the cases the child's other parent was not living at the same address. Forty-eight percent of the parents or guardians that were surveyed, and 49% of the child's other parent, had a high school diploma. Unemployment rates were extremely high, especially if one considers the national average of 5%. Specifically, 60% of the people completing the parent survey reported being unemployed, and 44% said that their child's other parent was unemployed as well. Of the 43 teachers who completed the survey, 73% had more than five years of teaching experience, and the average number of students in the classrooms they were serving was 24.

Parent Involvement at Home

Teachers reported that several of their students completed their homework on an average night but not necessarily well. Educators also agreed that performance would improve if someone at home could help the children with homework. In addition, some teachers voiced their concern that in certain cases someone else may have completed the homework instead of the child.

Steps Following the Survey

In response to views expressed by parents and teachers both in the survey as well as in conversations with project staff, a series of materials and strategies were shared with teachers to enhance their communication with parents and expand parent involvement. The following are samples of the SFP activities that took place during the 1996-1997 school year:

- Parents were provided with tips to assist their children with homework more effectively
- Parents were encouraged to read to their children and take them to the library often, since reading is the single most important activity for building prerequisite knowledge necessary for reading success.
- Teachers were assisted in developing positive notes or certificates to inform parents of something good their child did.

- Teachers were assisted in creating newsletters and other informative documents, sharing homework and other classroom routines and expectations in order to assist parents to better monitor their children's school work.
- Teachers were offered some helpful tips found in the literature to maximize the benefits of a parent-teacher conference.

Future Plans

Based on our findings and experiences, the School-Family Partnership program is gearing up to begin the new school year with an even more comprehensive approach. We are adding more practice-oriented items in our survey to make its use even more informative and directly applicable to school-settings. In addition, we are preparing an SFP training manual, which will include specific information, materials, and implementation techniques on the areas of positive, two-way communication and family involvement in children's learning.

In addition, we are adding a new site in the mid-Atlantic region to our collaborative schools. This will provide us with the opportunity to pilot our SFP activities and materials in a school which works closely with the Laboratory for Student Success. In the future, we plan to increase the number of schools in the mid-Atlantic region in preparation for wider dissemination of our project.

Appendix A

Teacher Survey

Teacher Survey

This year we will be trying out some new parent involvement activities to better support our school program. This survey will be used as a baseline to see what changes occur as a result of our efforts; later in the year, we will ask you to respond to these questions again. We won't share your responses with anyone; they are private. However, by putting your name on the survey you will make it possible for us to make helpful information available to you.

How often do you do these in a typical week?	**Less than 1 time**	**1-2 times**	**3-4 times**	**5 times or more**
Assign homework.	0	1	2	3
Send a note to parents to let them know their child is having a problem at school.	0	1	2	3
Send a note to parents to let them know their child is doing well at school.	0	1	2	3
Call parents to let them know their child is having a problem at school.	0	1	2	3
Call parents to let them know their child is doing well at school.	0	1	2	3
Meet with a parent at school (not counting Report Card Pickup).	0	1	2	3
Greet parents who are dropping off/picking up their children at school.	0	1	2	3
Send home books or magazines that a child can read for fun.	0	1	2	3

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How often did these happen *this month?*	Never	1 time	2 or more times
Invited parent volunteers to help out at school.	0	1	2
Explained to parents *how* they can help their children with school work.	0	1	2
Sent home information about what the children are learning at school.	0	1	2
Visited a child's home.	0	1	2
Allowed a parent to call you at home.	0	1	2
You were unable to get in touch with a parent.	0	1	2
You were able to get in touch with a parent only after great difficulty.	0	1	2
You asked a parent for a meeting and were refused.	0	1	2
A parent tried to meet with you while classes were in session.	0	1	2
A parent complained that you assign too much homework.	0	1	2
A parent asked for help in understanding a child's homework.	0	1	2
You had difficulty communicating with a parent because of language differences.	0	1	2
A child came to school too sleepy to work.	0	1	2
A child came to you with a homework problem before or after school.	0	1	2
A child's performance improved after you spoke with a parent.	0	1	2
A parent volunteered to help out at school.	0	1	2
A meeting with a parent had a negative tone.	0	1	2
You and a parent worked well together to improve a child's school performance.	0	1	2

How many of your students...	Number of students
do their homework on an average night?	
do their homework well on an average night?	
have somebody else do the homework for them on an average night?	
would do better in school if someone at home could help them with homework?	

On average, how many of your students' parents...	Number of students
attend parent-teacher conferences?	
attend report card pick up?	
help out when you make a specific request?	
are interested in how their children perform at school?	
are available to come to school to help out when needed?	
have the ability to come to school to help out?	
know enough to be able to help their children do better at school?	
encourage their children to behave respectfully towards adults at school	
encourage their children to stay out of fights or get along well with other children	

Would you be willing...	No	Maybe	Yes
to have parents helping out in your classroom?	0	1	2
to send home personal notes to students' parents?	0	1	2
to call parents to talk with them about their children?	0	1	2

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Background Information:

My name is _____

I teach: Pre-kindergarten Kindergarten 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

I have _____ children in my class.
(Number)

I speak ____ English ____ Spanish ____ Other

I have _____ years of teaching experience.

What is the best strategy that you use to work effectively with your students' parents?

Please share any comments about how our school can develop the best school-family partnerships?

Thank you!

Appendix B

Parent Survey
(English Version)

Parent Survey

We at Smyth-Joyner School are trying to help your children to learn better. If we are to succeed, we will need your help. Please complete this survey. It asks about some things that have been found to improve student achievement. We will use this information to guide some of our school improvement efforts. Your individual responses will be confidential.

Instructions:

Only ONE person should fill out the survey.

The adult in your home who has the MOST contact with our school should fill out the survey.

Please fill out and return ONLY ONE survey. Fill it out for the oldest child that you have in grades pre-kindergarten through grade 3.

How many days do these happen during *an average week?*	**Less than 1 day**	**1 day**	**2-4 days**	**5-7 days**
I talk to my child about what he or she is learning at school.	0	1	2	3
I read with my child.	0	1	2	3
I help my child with homework.	0	1	2	3
I have my child in bed by 9:00 PM on school nights.	0	1	2	3
I check that my child's homework is done.	0	1	2	3
I make sure that my child has a quiet place to do homework.	0	1	2	3
I talk to my child about getting along with his or her friends.	0	1	2	3
I arrange for my child to play with other children of his or her age.	0	1	2	3
My child has homework from school.	0	1	2	3
My child tells me he or she already did her homework at school.	0	1	2	3
My child has trouble understanding the homework.	0	1	2	3
I have trouble understanding my child's homework	0	1	2	3

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OVER PLEASE

How often did these happen *this school year*?	**Never**	**1-2 times**	**Several times**
Information was sent home about what my child is learning at school (separate from report card).	**0**	**1**	**2**
Teacher suggested ways I could help my child do well at school.	**0**	**1**	**2**
Teacher asked for my help.	**0**	**1**	**2**
Teacher invited me to school.	**0**	**1**	**2**
Teacher called me or sent a note about how my child was doing.	**0**	**1**	**2**
I took my child to the library.	**0**	**1**	**2**
I volunteered to help in my child's classroom.	**0**	**1**	**2**
I asked the teacher how I can help my child with school work.	**0**	**1**	**2**
I went to parent-teacher conferences.	**0**	**1**	**2**
I picked up my child's report card.	**0**	**1**	**2**
I visited my child's classroom.	**0**	**1**	**2**
Called or went to see my child's teacher.	**0**	**1**	**2**

Would you be willing to...	No	Maybe	Yes
come to workshops to find out how to help your child with homework?	0	1	2
talk with your child's teacher on the phone more often?	0	1	2
come to workshops to find out how to help your child get along with others	0	1	2

	Does not apply	Never	Sometimes	Usually
Does your child's teacher share information with you in a positive way?	X	0	1	2
Does the teacher answer your questions in a helpful way?	X	0	1	2
Does the teacher try to make you feel comfortable when you meet?	X	0	1	2
Does the teacher greet you in the morning when you take your child to school?	X	0	1	2
Is it easy to get to talk to or meet with your child's teacher?	X	0	1	2
Does the teacher let you know when your child is having trouble at school?	X	0	1	2
Does the teacher let you know when your child is doing something well at school?	X	0	1	2
Does the teacher tell you specific ways that you could help your child do better?	X	0	1	2
Do the teacher's suggestions work in helping your child?	X	0	1	2
Does the teacher encourage you to come to school to visit or help?	X	0	1	2

About Your Child (only your child in the *highest grade*):

What grade is this child in?

Pre-kindergarten Kindergarten 1 2 3

Who is your child's teacher?_____

My child is a: _____ boy _____ girl

OVER PLEASE

Background Information:

How are you related to the child? Please check only one.

____ Mother or stepmother _____ Other relative

____ Father or stepfather _____ Guardian

How many adults (18 years of age and older) live in your home? _____

How many children (17 years of age and under) live in your home? _____

Are you employed now? Please check one.

_____ Employed full-time _____ Employed part-time _____ Not employed now

Is your child's other parent living in your home? ___Yes ___No

Is your child's other parent employed now? Please check one.

_____ Employed full-time _____ Employed part-time _____ Not employed now

Can you be reached by phone? ___Yes ___No

What is your highest education level? Please check ONLY ONE item.

____Grade school ____Some college or vocational training

____Some high school ____College degree

____High School Diploma of G.E.D.

What is the highest education level of your child's other parent? Please check ONLY ONE item.

____Grade school ____G.E.D.

____Some high school ____Some college or vocational training

____High School Diploma ____College Degree

What languages can you speak?

____ English ____ Spanish ____Other

What languages are you comfortable with?

____ English ____ Spanish ____Other

THANK YOU.

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Appendix C

Parent Survey
(Spanish version)

Encuesta Para Padres

La escuela Jungman está buscando la manera de ayudar a sus niños para que sus niños aprendan mejor. Para poder triunfar, necesitamos su ayuda. Por favor, ayúdenos y llene esta encuesta. Esta información será utilizada como guia en nuestra campaña para mejorar la escuela. Su respuesta individual será confidencial.

Instrucciones:

Solamente debe llenar UNA encuesta ya sea la de Español o la de Inglés.

La encuesta debe ser llenada por el adulto que tiene más contacto con la escuela.

Solamente UNA persona deberá llenar la encuesta.

Por favor llene y regrese SOLAMENTE UNA encuesta.

Si tiene más de un niño en la escuela, llene solamente (una encuesta) para su niño mayor.

Cuántos días suceden estas situaciones regularmente durante la semana?	**Menos de 1 dia**	**1 dia**	**De 2 a 4 dias**	**De 5 a 7 dias**
Hablo con mi niño sobre lo que está aprendiendo en la escuela.	0	1	2	3
Leo con mi niño.	0	1	2	3
Ayudo a mi niño con su tarea	0	1	2	3
Mi niño se acuesta a dormir a las 9:00 de la noche en los dias que tiene clase.	0	1	2	3
Reviso la tarea de mi niño para estar segura(o) que la terminó	0	1	2	3
Me aseguro que mi niño tenga un lugar tranquilo para hacer su tarea.	0	1	2	3
Hablo a mi niño acerca de como llevarse bien con sus amigos.	0	1	2	3
Me pongo de acuerdo con otras madres para que mi niño juegue con otros niños de su edad.	0	1	2	3
La escuela le deja tarea a mi niño.	0	1	2	3
Mi niño me dice cuando ya hizo su tarea en la escuela.	0	1	2	3
Mi niño tiene dificultad en entender su tarea.	0	1	2	3
Tengo dificultad en entender la tarea de mi niño.	0	1	2	3

PASAR A LA OTRA PAGINA

Con que frequencia ocurrieron estas cosas durante este año escolar:	Nunca	De 1 a 2 veces	Varias veces
Se mandó información a casa sobre lo que mi niño está aprendiendo en la escuela (aparte de su boleta de calificaciones).	0	1	2
La maestra me indicó como puedo ayudar a mi niño para que le vaya bien en la escuela.	0	1	2
La maestra me pidió ayuda.	0	1	2
La maestra me invitó a la escuela.	0	1	2
La maestra me ha llamado o envió una nota a la casa sobre como va mi niño en la escuela.	0	1	2
Llevé mi niño a la biblioteca.	0	1	2
Me ofrecí para ayudar como voluntaria en el salón de mi niño.	0	1	2
Le pregunté a la maestra de mi niño como le puedo ayudar a mi niño con su trabajo de la escuela.	0	1	2
Fuí a las conferencias de padres y maestros.	0	1	2
Recogí la boleta de calificaciones de mi niño.	0	1	2
Visité el salón de clase de mi niño.	0	1	2
Llamé y fuí a ver a la maestra de mi niño.	0	1	2

Estaría Ud. Dispuesta a...	No	Tal vez	Sí
Venir a talleres para saber como ayudar a su niño con la tarea?	0	1	2
Hablar mas frecuentemente por teléfono con la maestra de su niño?	0	1	2
Venir a talleres para aprender como ayudar a su niño para que se lleve bien con sus amigos?	0	1	2

	No aplica	Nunca	Algunas Veces	Usualmente
La maestra de su niño comparte información con Ud. de una manera positiva?	X	0	1	2
La maestra responde a sus preguntas de una manera satisfactoria?	X	0	1	2
La maestra trata de hacerla sentir a gusto cuando se reúne con Ud.?	X	0	1	2
La maestra la saluda en la mañana cuando lleva su niño a la escuela?	X	0	1	2
Es fácil hablar o reunirse con la maestra de su niño?	X	0	1	2
La maestra le dice cuando su niño está teniendo problemas en escuela?	X	0	1	2
La maestra le dice cuando su niño está haciendo las cosas bien en la escuela?	X	0	1	2
La maestra le da formas específicas de como Ud. puede ayudar a su niño mejorar en la escuela?	X	0	1	2
Las sugerencias de la maestra le ayudan en el mejoramiento de su niño?	X	0	1	2
La maestra la motiva para que venga a la escuela de visita o para ayudar en el salón?	X	0	1	2

Información sobre su niño (solamente el niño que tenga en el grado más avanzado):

¿En qué grado está?

Pre-kinder Kinder 1 2 3

¿Como se llama la maestra de su niño? _____

Mi hijo(a) es: _____ niño _____ niña

PASAR A LA OTRA PAGINA

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Información de antecedentes: Por favor marque solamente una respuesta.

¿Cúal es su relación con el niño?

_____ Madre o madrastra _____Otro familiar

_____ Padre o padrastro _____ Guardian

¿Cuántos adultos viven en su hogar que tengan mas de 18 años de edad? _____

¿Cuántos niños viven en su hogar que tienene menos de 17 años? _____

¿Está Ud empleada actualmente? Por favor marque solamente una respuesta.

_____ Tiempo completo (40 horas por semana)

_____ Tiempo parcial (menos de 40 horas por semana)

_____ No estoy empleada

¿Viven juntos los dos padres de su niño? _____Sí _____No

¿Está empleado el otro padre de su niño actualmente? Por favor marque una respuesta.

_____ Tiempo completo (40 horas por semana)

_____ Tiempo parcial (menos de 40 horas por semana)

_____ No esta empleado

¿Podemos llamarle por teléfono? _____Sí _____No

¿Cúal es su más alto nivel de educación? (Marque UNA respuesta)

_____Primaria _____ Colegio o Escuela Vocacional

_____Secundaria _____ Graduada(o) de Universidad

_____ Diploma de Secundaria o G.E.D.

¿Cúal es el nivel más alto de educación del otro padre del niño? Por favor marque UNA respuesta.

_____Primaria _____ Colegio o Escuela Vocacional

_____Secundaria _____ Graduada(o) de Universidad

_____ Diploma de Secundaria o G.E.D.

¿Que idiomas sabe hablar?

_____ Español _____ Inglés _____Otro

¿Con cual idioma se siente comodo(a) hablando?

_____Español _____Inglés _____Otro

GRACIAS

The Laboratory for Student Success

The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is one of ten regional educational laboratories in the nation funded by the U.S. Department of Education to revitalize and reform educational practice in the service of children and youth.

The mission of the Laboratory for Student Success is to strengthen the capacity of the mid-Atlantic region to enact and sustain lasting systemic educational reform through collaborative programs of applied research and development and services to the field. In particular, the LSS facilitates the transformation of research-based knowledge into useful tools that can be readily integrated into the educational reform process both regionally and nationally. To ensure a high degree of effectiveness, the work of the LSS is continuously refined based on feedback from the field on what is working and what is needed in improving educational practice.

The ultimate goal of the LSS is the formation of a connected system of schools, parents, community agencies, professional organizations, and institutions of higher education that serves the needs of all students and is linked with a high-tech national system for information exchange. In particular, the aim is to bring researchers and research-based knowledge into synergistic coordination with other efforts for educational improvement led by field-based professionals.

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